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## School Psycho-Social Stress Variables and Academic Achievement Motivation of Senior Secondary Two Students in Uyo Education Zone

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### **Abstract:**

*This study was carried out to examine the influence of some psycho-social stress variables on academic achievement motivation of Senior Secondary Two (SS 2) students in public secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Three null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The survey research design was used in carrying out the study. The population for the study comprised all the 10,871 students in SS 2 classes in 36 public secondary schools in the four Local Government Areas of Uyo Education Zone. The sample used for this study consists of 420 SS 2 students. The Purposive sampling technique was used to select 20 secondary schools from the study area, while the Simple Random sampling technique was used to select the sample for the study. One researcher made instrument titled "School Psycho-Social Stressors Questionnaire" (SPSSQ) and a standardized instrument titled "Aberdeen Academic Achievement Motivation Inventory" (AAAMI) were used to collect data from the respondents. The Cronbach Alpha Analysis was used to compute the reliability of the research instruments used for the study. This yielded reliability coefficients of .70 for the SPSSQ and .76 for the AAAMI which were considered sufficient for the study. The dependent t-test was used to test the null hypotheses. The results led to the rejection of all the null hypotheses. Based on the findings, it was concluded that academic frustration, social anxiety, and self-loathing have significant influence on the academic achievement motivation of Senior Secondary Two students in Uyo Education Zone. Recommendations made include, among others, that teachers and counsellors should help students in setting realistic goals to keep them motivated and reduce the attendant frustration that sets in when goals are not met and more attention needs to be paid on students' mental wellbeing and appropriate referrals made when and where necessary.*

**Keywords:** *Psycho-social stress, academic achievement motivation, academic frustration, social anxiety and self-loathing*

### **1. Introduction/Literature Review**

In every venture that an individual is involved in, there is an ultimate goal to excel and to attain success. In the Secondary School setting, students toil day and night to achieve success, get promoted to the next class or level, and ultimately make good grades in their final Secondary School Certificate Examinations (SSCE). In order to achieve academically, a learner must be adequately motivated. Academic achievement motivation is the drive individuals have to succeed in their academic endeavours. Singh (2011) defined academic achievement motivation as an innate drive that directs academic behaviour with the sole aim of attaining academic goals set by the individual. When students engage in academic activities like studying, doing their homework, participating in classroom activities and attending classes, they are not always cajoled into these activities. Students work hard in school because they have the inner drive that spurs them on to work for academic achievement. Bui (2007:322) defined academic achievement motivation as "a social form of motivation involving a competitive desire to meet academic standards of excellence". Academic achievement motivation drives a student towards success in school.

Academic achievement motivation stems from a relatively high level of achievement motivation, which was defined by Sprinthall, Sprinthall and Oja (1994) in Onete, Edet, Udey and Ogbor (2012) as the motive to achieve just for the sake of achieving, rather than achievement in the service of some other motives. Academic achievement motivation is guided by a feeling of self-directed competence, self-regulation and self-efficacy – an individual's attribute that supersedes

just a momentary feeling of gratification derived from occasional feats of attained scholarly goals (King, 2007; Pietsh, Walker, & Champman, 2008; Onete et al, 2012).

The school is not only a physical structure of classroom buildings, laboratories and libraries; it also consists of both psychological and social environments. Okoro (2011:62) saw the school psychological environment as "the atmosphere under which individuals interact with the other persons in the school". The school environment consists of different individuals from various backgrounds. This creates myriads of relationships between students and teachers, as well as amongst students. The totality of the relationships formed between the members of the school community is known as the school social environment. Alodi (2010) claimed that the school social environment is shaped by the relationships between teachers and pupils, and among pupils. The author further opined that interpersonal relationships, student-teacher relationships, peer relationships, teachers' beliefs and behaviours, teachers' communication styles, classroom management and group processes are core concepts in the school social environment.

A juxtaposition of both the psychological and social environment of the school is known as the school psycho-social environment. The school psycho-social environment could be defined as the interpersonal relationships in the school, the social environment and how the students and the staff interact with each other. It also involves the students' perception of the learning situation in the school. UNESCO (nd) saw a school psycho-social environment as the inter-link between psycho-social aspects of our school environment. These psycho-social aspects include thoughts, emotions, behaviour and learners' wider social experiences e.g. their relationships, traditions and culture.

Learners are psychologically affected by the surrounding social conditions that may hinder or enhance the effectiveness of learning (Okoro, 2011). Some of these conditions could be stressful and debilitating to the students' psychological wellbeing. Known as psycho-social stressors, these conditions are almost inevitable because it emanates from the constant interactions between learners and other members of their learning environment. Psycho-social stressors, according to Velting, Setzer and Albano (2008), are psycho-social experiences which an individual find challenging or difficult. It is a feeling of pressure that inhibits an individual's daily functioning as a result of his interaction with agents of his immediate environment, social or psychological. Students learn in an environment characterized by myriads of activities, some of which are inimical to their psychosocial wellbeing. White and Farell (2009) opined that numerous studies have shown that exposure to various activities takes its toll on individuals, at some point in their lives. This is because cumulative effects of frequent psycho-social stress on students eventually hamper the individual student's ability to cope with the hassles of scholarly life.

Frustration is a common stressor in everyday life. Onyejiaku and Onyejiaku (2011:183) defined frustration as "a feeling of helplessness, disappointment, inadequacy and anxiety that is produced by interference with a felt need". In the school environment, individuals have various needs that range from scoring high grades in class work to being accepted by their peers and teachers. When these needs are thwarted there is always a tendency for frustration to set in. Academic frustration is an adverse feeling that arises when a student's academic goals are not met. It is a state of mind characterized by anxiety and hopelessness, that is necessitated by the failure of a student to meet set academic targets. Kitsune (2011) defined academic frustration as a mental state characterized by being upset by one or multiple factors that are directly or indirectly related to school, classes, homework or other academic aspects of an individual's life. Academic Frustration is often a common phenomenon among students. Biruntha and Muthaiyan (2015) opined that in the course of schooling, life is not always smooth. Thus, academic frustration, which they defined as a common emotional response which arises from the perceived resistance to the fulfillment of individual needs, is bound to occur at one point or another.

Academic frustration is a common issue in schools. It is a sort of disillusionment that stems from a student's inability to meet with expectations set by himself or his teacher(s), as regards scholastic activities. Academic frustration has profound effects on students' academic performance, and academic engagement (Wilde, 2012; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup & Kenzie, 2008; Harrington, 2007). Wilde (2012) claimed that studying can easily become a frustrating experience. Students who struggle to cope with academic frustration, therefore, embrace procrastination which is often detrimental to academic achievement, creates more anxiety and deepens academic frustration. Essel and Owusu (2017) looked at the sources of academic frustration for students in schools. They claimed that students who suffer from academic frustration reported increased school workload, low grades, procrastination, and examination anxiety and communication difficulties. These factors contribute significantly to the difficulties that plague scholarly experience.

Social anxiety is another stressor that is prevalent in a school psycho-social environment. This is a condition which leads to avoidance of social situations by individuals (Richards, 2015). Also known as social phobia, social anxiety is the fear of interaction with other people as well as an incessant feeling of being negatively judged by people. Individuals who suffer from social anxiety find it difficult making friends, interacting with people, partaking in group activities or even addressing a gathering. Social anxiety is a pervasive condition which causes tension and fear and hinders an individual's daily functioning. Even the most confident of individuals, at one point or another, can get anxious before immersing themselves in a social situation, but that does not mean they have social anxiety. Social anxiety is a more intense and overwhelming feeling of inexplicable fear that accompany thoughts of, or the actual involvement in an activity that requires a group of people. Cherry, Jacobs, Thornberry and Gillaspay (2015) saw social anxiety as a condition characterized by a recurrent state of tension and fear occasioned by exposure to social situations. Mangal (2007) endorsed the claim that social anxiety is a serious psychological stressor. He claimed that social phobia entails a maladaptive behavioural pattern dominated by chronic apprehensiveness and acute anxiety that occurs when an individual is exposed to public glare.

Students who have social anxiety tend to fear and avoid social situations. They are often worried that their behaviour could be embarrassing. They are mindful and conscious of the presence of their peers and teachers. They find it difficult answering or asking questions in the class, irrespective of any apparent need to do so. This must not be

misconstrued as mere shyness. National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH)(nd) claimed that social anxiety is a persistent condition that does not go away without help. It is a debilitating condition that makes it extremely difficult for an individual to adjust properly to his school environment. Social adaptation is a necessity if a student is to integrate fully into the school environment. Social anxiety makes this adaptation difficult.

As a child grows, he begins to form a global concept of himself (Mangal, 2007). The concept a child forms of himself is often a function of both his physical and mental attributes, as well as his ability to grasp, retain and process information. Individual who get negative feedbacks from self-evaluation could resort to self-loathing (Lee & Davies, 2007). Self-loathing is an extreme form of doubting oneself, never seeing good in one's ability and an inexplicable sense of defeatism embedded in an individual's consciousness. It is normal for an individual to criticize himself once in a while, but this becomes a problem if this criticism becomes persistent, persuasive and starts hindering an individual's daily functioning. Howard (2016) saw self-loathing as a symptom of depressive disorder which leads an individual to believe that they are worthless and incapable of succeeding. Rufus (2013) also claimed that self-loathing is a learned behaviour, a prejudice an individual develops against himself. This feeling of inadequacy stems from a negative perception an individual has formed over time about oneself. It is not uncommon to encounter people who believe every other person is better than them. They see their efforts as below par, they are scared of comparing themselves to others, and believe that they are total failures, irrespective of any possible positive trait(s) they have. This group of people find it difficult to adapt to their immediate academic environment because they view themselves as wrong fits who cannot succeed.

Aryana (2010) asserted that students who loathe themselves view themselves as passive learners who are incapable of setting higher goals which inhibits learning new things. Self-loathing robs a student of the requisite confidence needed to try out new things, with the ultimate goal of expanding knowledge. It also creates a sense of isolation in an individual (Harper & Tuckmann, 2006). This tendency to exclude themselves from group activities makes it difficult for such students to fully participate in classroom academic or social activities, leading to adverse academic performance. Ulrich (2010) alluded to the "seeds of discouragement" to explain how self-loathing hinders an individual learner. Seeds of discouragement, in this context, refer to the effect of the gradual build-up of doubt in an individual as his concept of self continues to take one hit after another. Eventually, these "seeds" dominate the student's consciousness as his feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness become deeply rooted. Once a student becomes over whelmed by these thoughts, disillusionment sets in, hampering the zeal for academic engagement (Aryana, 2010; Lavasani, Weisani & Shariati, 2013; Harper & Tuckmann 2006).

### 1.1. Statement of the Problem

It has been observed that for any student to attain academic success, get promoted to the next class, get admitted into a tertiary institution and achieve mastery goals of learning, such a learner has to possess the drive to work for academic achievement. Students motivated to achieve academically have the needed drive to succeed and exhibit academic goal-oriented behaviour. Unfortunately, some students exhibit an unwillingness to partake in academic activities. While some of these behaviour could be attributed to the said students' inability to learn, most students who are remarkably intelligent still exhibit academic apathy, outright truancy and an obvious lack of drive to work toward academic achievement. Over the past years, researchers have devoted a significant amount of time to investigate both environmental and teacher-related factors that could be behind the prevalence of low academic achievement motivation among learners, yet this negative trend persists.

Therefore, the researchers intend to investigate other factors that stem from the school psycho-social environment to see if stressful experiences are responsible for the relative lack of academic achievement motivation among most learners. Psycho-social stressors like academic overload, social anxiety, bullying, academic frustration and self-loathing were identified as prevalent experiences that arise in the course of a learner's daily interactions with other members of the school community. Thus, the problem of this study is whether selected school psycho-social stressors significantly influence academic achievement motivation of secondary school students in Uyo Education Zone.

### 1.2. Objectives of the Study

This study is carried out to investigate the extent to which selected school psycho-social stressors influence public secondary school students' academic achievement motivation. Specifically, the study seeks to determine the extent to which:

- Academic frustration influences secondary school students' academic achievement motivation.
- Social anxiety influences secondary school students' academic achievement motivation.
- Self-Loathing influence secondary school students' academic achievement motivation.

### 1.3. Hypotheses

Three null hypotheses have been formulated and will be tested at 0.05 level of significance.

- Ho<sub>1</sub>: Academic frustration has no significant influence on students' academic achievement motivation.
- Ho<sub>2</sub>: Social anxiety has no significant influence on students' academic achievement motivation.
- Ho<sub>3</sub>: Self-loathing has no significant influence on students' academic achievement motivation.

## 2. Research Design

The Survey Research Design was adopted for this study. This design is considered as a suitable choice for this study because it enabled the researcher to make use of questionnaires to measure the extent to which some school – related psycho-social variables affect students' academic achievement motivation using reliable and valid questionnaires.

### 2.1. Area of the Study

The area of the study is Uyo Education Zone. Uyo Education Zone comprises 4 Local Government Areas. These Local Government Areas are: Uyo, Uruan, Nsit-Atai, and Ibesikpo Asutan Local Government Areas. According to National Population Commission, NPC (2006), this Education Zone has a population of 767,067 (Seven Hundred and Sixty-Seven Thousand, Sixty-Seven) people. Uyo Education Zone is situated in the heart of Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Inhabitants of Uyo Education Zone are mostly of the Ibibio tribe. They are mostly Christians and engage in Civil Service work. There are also significant number of farmers, small-scale entrepreneurs, traders, artisans and fishermen. This zone is renowned for the hospitality and peaceful coexistence that exist between the aborigines and immigrants who reside together. They are also renowned for their hard work and determination to succeed in any venture they are involved in.

### 2.2. Population of the Study

The population for this study comprises all the students in Senior Secondary Two classes in Public Secondary Schools in Uyo Education Zone. This comprises a total of 10,871 SS 2 students in the 36 Public Secondary Schools in Uyo Education Zone. (State Secondary Education Board, 2018).

### 2.3. Sample and Sampling Technique

The 4 Local Government Areas that make up Uyo Education Zone are Ibesikpo, Nsit-Atai, Uyo and Uruan. The selected LGAs have a population of 10,871 SS2 students. 20 public secondary schools were purposively selected out of 36 schools found in the Four (4) Local Government Areas. In each of the 20 schools purposively selected, 21 students were selected using hat and draw method, which gave a total of 420 sampled respondents. This was done by folding pieces of papers with "yes" and "no" options into a hat, hence, those who picked "yes" options during the shuffling process were selected.

### 2.4. Instrumentation

Two instruments were used for data collection in this study. A researcher made instrument titled, School Psycho-social Stressors Questionnaire (SPSSQ) was used to elicit responses in line with the sub-variables discussed in this study. This instrument is divided into two sections, A and B. while Section A contains two items on the respondent's personal information such as name of school and area of specialization, section B contains 15 items which are designed to elicit responses on academic frustration, social anxiety and self-loathing. Responses were assessed by a means of a four-point rating scale as follows. Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A) Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD). These responses were scored as 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively.

To measure the academic achievement motivation level of the students an adapted version of Aberdeen Academic Achievement Motivation Inventory (AAAMI) was used to measure the respondents' academic achievement motivation level. This instrument was standardized by Entwistle (1976) and consists of twenty-four items with "Yes" or "No" answers. Yes, will be scored 1 in a positive statement, and Zero (0) in a negative statement, while No will be scored Zero (0) in a positive statement and One (1) in a negative statement.

### 2.5. Validation of the Instrument

The researchers scrutinized the instruments to ensure that they provided responses to the stated objectives. They then presented the instruments to five experts, two from the Department of Psychology and three Measurement and Evaluation experts from the Department of Educational Foundations, Guidance and Counselling, all in the University of Uyo, Uyo, to establish the face and content validity of the instruments. Expert suggestions were guided by the need to reflect local content, bearing in mind that one of the instruments, AAAMI, was designed in Europe. Expert inputs were incorporated into the final copies of the instruments.

### 2.6. Reliability of the Instrument

To ascertain the reliability index, the researchers used the Cronbach's Alpha procedure, using 50 students from the study area who were not scheduled to take part in the study. The questionnaires were administered to them and the Cronbach alpha coefficient obtained for the SPSSQ was .70 while a reliability coefficient of .76 was obtained for the AAAMI. These reliability scores were considered high enough for the use of the instruments.

### 2.7. Method of Data Analysis

Data collected for this study from the questionnaires were analyzed using the dependent t-test. When the calculated t-value is higher than the critical value the null hypothesis was rejected. Whereas the null hypothesis was accepted when the critical value was higher than the calculated t-value.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Hypothesis One

Academic frustration has no significant influence on students' academic achievement motivation in Uyo Education Zone.

Variables	N	Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	SD	Df	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Academic Frustration	420	10.24	2.55				
				419	21.76	1.96	S
Academic Achievement Motivation	420	14.27	2.71				

Table 1: T-Test Analysis of Responses on the Influence of Academic Frustration on Students' Academic Achievement Motivation  
S = Significant,  $P > .05$ ; Df = 419

Table 1 reveals that the calculated t-value of 21.76 is greater than the t-critical of 1.96 at .05 level of significance and at 419 degrees of freedom. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternate hypothesis is retained. This result implies that academic frustration has a significant influence on the academic achievement motivation of SS 2 students in public secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone. Academic frustration has a significant influence on senior secondary two students' academic achievement motivation. This implies that students who experience high extent of academic frustration have low academic achievement motivation. This finding is in tandem with the finding of the study conducted by Wilde (2012). The author found a significant relationship between frustration intolerance and students' low academic achievement. Frustration is normal for any individual who is engaged in any goal-oriented activity. However, when the individual is unable to exhibit frustration tolerance - the ability to maintain focus even when set goals are not met, the academic achievement motivation of such students is negatively affected. Frustration intolerance alters a learner's focus and creates the feeling of defeatism which eventually erodes the said learner's academic achievement motivation. This finding is also in line with the study conducted by Madjar, Bachner and Kushnir (2012) which revealed a negative relationship between frustration and academic achievement motivation of students. High academic achievers and motivated students are those who are capable of coping with academic frustration. They have the ability to tolerate thwarted goals, rearrange their goals, retain their focus and strive toward academic achievement. When an individual lacks this ability, the drive to strive for academic excellence declines.

#### 3.2. Hypothesis Two

Social anxiety has no significant influence on secondary school students' academic achievement motivation in Uyo Education Zone.

Variables	N	Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	SD	Df	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Social Anxiety	420	11.78	1.91				
				419	12.36	1.96	S
Academic Achievement Motivation	420	14.27	2.71				

Table 2: T-Test Analysis of Responses on the Influence of Social Anxiety on Students' Academic Achievement Motivation  
S = Significant,  $P < .05$ ; Df = 419

Table 2 reveals that the calculated t-value of 12.36 is greater than the t-critical of 1.96 at .05 level of significance and at 419 degrees of freedom. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternate hypothesis is retained. This result implies that social anxiety has a significant influence on the academic achievement motivation of SS 2 students in public secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone.

This finding is in line with the finding of the study conducted by Schwartz (2017). The author found that students with social anxiety seldom strive to attain long term mastery goals. This tendency is linked to their inability to socially adjust to the school psycho-social environment, heightened avoidance-syndrome and consequent decline of their academic achievement motivation. This finding is also in agreement with the finding of the study conducted by Magelinskaite, Kepalaite and Legkauskas (2013). The authors found that high school anxiety was linked to lower academic achievement motivation. They, Magelinskaite et al. (2013) explained that students who are motivated to achieve devise strategies which help them to cope with situations that induces anxiety. This helps them remain focused on their academic endeavours. Learners who struggle to attain social adjustment, on the other hand, develop the avoidance syndrome, a situation whereby an individual consciously avoids a perceived stressful event. They avoid school and all school related activities.

#### 3.3. Hypothesis Three

Self-loathing has no significant influence on secondary school student academic achievement motivation in Uyo Education Zone.

Variables	N	Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	SD	Df	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Self-loathing	420	14.42	2.84				
				419	9.97	1.96	S
Academic Achievement Motivation	420	14.27	2.71				

*Table 3: T-Test Analysis of Responses on the Influence of Self-Loathing on Students' Academic Achievement Motivation*  
*S = Significant,  $P < .05$ ; Df = 419*

Table 3 shows that the calculated t-value of 9.97 is greater than the critical value of 1.96 at .05 significant level and at 419 degrees of freedom. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternate hypothesis is retained. This result implies that self-loathing has significant influence on the academic achievement motivation of SS 2 students in public secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone. The finding is in consonance with that of the study conducted by Peck (2017) which revealed that students who felt a sense of belonging exhibit academic perseverance. On the contrary, students who wallow in self-loathing have been known to isolate themselves because they feel they do not truly belong to any social group. Such students are not always motivated to achieve academically because they prefer to alienate themselves from others, even when they ought to participate in group academic activities. Coetze (2011), in a study, also found that students with a negative concept of self-exhibit a sense of defeatism, usually skip classes, stay away from school and consequently suffer poor academic performance and motivation. This finding is also in line with the findings of the study conducted by Williams and Desteno (2009), who found that self-loathing leads to increased feelings of isolation, depressive thoughts and low academic achievement drive. Students who exhibit self-loathing have negative self-concept, they don't expect much from themselves and easily give in to various forms of pressure that emanate from the school environment. They blame themselves for everything and have low confidence and drive to succeed in school.

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that the selected school psycho-social stressors have significant influence on academic achievement motivation of senior secondary school students in Public Secondary Schools in Uyo Education Zone.

In view of the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- The teacher and the school management must be wary of rushing students through the school term's syllabus. The learners deserve adequate attention during instruction in such a way that the academic needs of individual learners are met at individual learner's pace. The idea of subjecting learners to myriads of information in order to meet up with the school calendar should be discouraged.
- Goal-setting should be encouraged by both the teachers and the counsellors. They should be involved in setting goals with their students from time to time to keep them motivated. Nevertheless, these goals have to be realistic and attainable by the students to prevent the incidence of academic frustration that could arise when lofty goals are not met.
- Adequate and sufficient care and attention should be given to students with emotional problems. The school counsellor must be proactive in helping students cope with social anxiety. There is need for proper diagnosis when symptoms become so pervasive that the learner cannot function properly. Assertiveness therapy, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and guided self-help are some of the strategies a counsellor can employ in helping learners whomanifest social anxiety.
- Self-loathing is a debilitating condition that is detrimental to a learner's optimal functioning. It is often characterized by depressive thoughts and a perpetual feeling of defeatism. The classroom teachers and the counsellors should pay more attention to the psychological wellbeing of the learners. Empathy and warmth should be shown to the learners, bearing in mind the myriads of negative experiences they are exposed to in school. Learners who exhibit extreme sense of hatred for self should be referred to experts for evaluation and therapy.

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